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DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: DAS BRYZA MEETS WITH CEC CHAIRMAN TARKHNISHVILI

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: On May 12, EUR DAS Matthew Bryza and the Ambassador met with the Chairman of the Central Election Commission (CEC), Levan Tarkhnishvili. Noting recent threats of violence around the elections, Tarkhnishvili said he considers violent protests at district (DEC) and precinct (PEC) election commissions more likely than attacks against himself. DAS Bryza said he told the Joint Opposition earlier (septel) that any violence is unacceptable and undemocratic. He then underlined the importance of transparency in the election process to Georgia's democratic development, western integration, and NATO aspirations. Tarkhnishvili briefed the group on CEC progress to date, and steps it is taking to increase public faith in the May 21 parliamentary elections. Tarkhnishvili told the Ambassador and DAS Bryza that there would be no delays in posting preliminary results, in the order received, on the CEC's website. End summary.

12. (C) On May 12, EUR DAS Matthew Bryza, the Ambassador, and EUR/CARC Conflicts Advisor Michael Carpenter met with CEC Chairman Levan Tarkhnishvili. The Ambassador pointed out the Embassy's and OSCE's concern for Tarkhnishvili's safety in light of recent protests and threats against him and his home. Asked if he has a guard, Tarkhnishvili said no, and that he considers violence at DEC's and PEC's more likely than attacks against him or the CEC. However, the Chairman noted the CEC will be moving to its previous building during election night, due to better security. (Note: On May 13 at an OSCE Ambassadors meeting, the need for security was noted by all. However, concern persists as to whether and how the CEC will manage the information flow, from DEC's and PEC's, and their IT infrastructure at the two different buildings. USAID Implementing Partner IFES has an IT consultant working onsite with the CEC's IT staff. IFES told Poloff that the CEC's IT department never moved to the new building. IFES said the CEC will test their fax network and receiving equipment to send and receive protocols on Saturday, May 17. End note.)

13. (C) DAS Bryza said to Tarkhnishvili that he told the Joint Opposition on May 9 (septel) that any violence is undemocratic and has no place in the election or Georgian society. Bryza told Levan Gachechiladze that his statements (threatening to "break jaws" on one occasion, and to drag "Tarkhnishvili by the necktie" on another) are unacceptable. Gachechiladze denied making the threats at first, then countered with arguments that if the elections were not fair, all options remained on the table.

14. (C) Bryza then underlined the importance of transparency in the election process to Georgia's democratic development. He said the current conflict with Russia in Abkhazia has improved general support for Georgia in Europe. However, Bryza said free and fair elections would be the most critical way to speed up Georgia's progress toward gaining a MAP with NATO.

15. (U) Tarkhnishvili discussed CEC actions to improve public

trust in the May 21 elections (some funded by USAID). These include: purchasing 1,000 additional GSM faxes which will allow more than one-half of all PECs to directly send their results to the CEC; re-deploying the CCTV cameras to high-traffic PECs in the cities, to cover more than one-half of all voters; improving the complaints process and ensuring that complainants have an opportunity to correct any technical errors; conducting PSAs for voter awareness and how-to-vote on TV and in the subways; providing a FAQ section once a week in Georgian, Russian, and Azeri papers; holding public CEC press announcements and CEC sessions; and improving training for all election commission staff (over 51,000 total, and nearly 2 percent of the electorate, of which 23,000 are from the opposition). Tarkhnishvili pointed out that the opposition now has representatives at all election commissions, and each party can have two representatives per PEC.

16. (SBU) Tarkhnishvili said the CEC would test their nation-wide fax reporting system this week. He told the Ambassador that in the 75 single-mandate, majoritarian districts, if 10 percent or more of the votes are canceled, then a new election will be held within two weeks. He said that there are two or three new Special PECs (used for military or police bases, with the results tallied with a regular PEC) with 10,000 more voters now included in these Special PECs. Tarkhnishvili said the increase is due to the return of soldiers from Iraq and soldiers on TDY in certain districts. He said all the Special PECs together equal no more than one percent of voters in any majoritarian district.

17. (C) Bryza acknowledged the CEC's preparations but again

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pointed out these elections must be fair to convince the U.S. and a skeptical Europe. Tarkhnishvili said he understands this. He said his staff is trained for any contingency and there would be no delays in posting preliminary results, in the order received, on the CEC's website.

18. (U) DAS Bryza has cleared this cable.  
TEFFT